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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the process of translating curriculum theory into a school program for young children. It is an inquiry into the usefulness of a curriculum theory in the formulation of goals and the establishment of specific behavioral criteria to be used in their evaluation. Curriculum theory taken from Goodlad's conceptual model provided the theoretical framework. The process of theory translation was guided by John I. Goodlad in weekly sessions with the group of teachers responsible for the educational program in the Early Childhood Phase of the University Elementary School, UCLA. (Author)

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TRANSLATING A THEORETICAL CURRICULUM MODEL INTO INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION MAKING

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As teachers strive to provide individually tailored instruction, their involvement in designing curriculum appears to be a highly desirable activity. Such involvement was achieved in a project undertaken in the Early Childhood Phase of the University Elementary School, University of California, Los Angeles. This paper will deal with the process in which teachers were engaged in developing instructional objectives and determining their usefulness in personalizing school experiences for young children.

At the time the study was begun, the Early Childhood Unit of the University Elementary School was an exemplary child-centered school for a select group of three, four and five year olds. Five teachers, familiar with the child-development theories of Freud and Erikson, were responsible for planning and conducting the educational program for this phase of the school. They held weekly meetings with the rather nebulous goals of studying children, programs, problems, and solutions. The content of these meetings included such topics as placement of children, instructional procedures, and anecdotal descriptions of the problems and strengths of individual children. Suggestions and solutions were of an intuitive nature rather than the result of any systematic process. Although personal assumptions, values, and goals were no doubt

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inherent in the intuitive responses, they were not at a conscious level and no consistent guidelines were governing decision making.

It was at this point that John Goodlad, the newly appointed director of the University Elementary School, and Louise Tyler, professor of Education, joined the group as consultants, instructors, and guides. Their guidance can be credited with much of the progress noted. Primarily they served two basic functions. At first it was that of questioning and extending the teachers' assertions, suggestions decisions, and solutions with an ever-recurring "Why"? Later it became one of acquainting the group with Goodlad's conceptual framework and guiding them in its use as they struggled to systematize curricular decisions. It was not always a comfortable process for the teachers. As they were pressed to explain the reasons underlying their selections of activities, materials, and procedures, it became evident that in many instances no clear rationale governed their decisions. They frequently became defensive - rationalizing their actions with statements of faith, dogma, and accepted practice - "Everybody has a sandbox!" Occasionally their discomfort led to the suspicion that these experts surely had the answers and were trying to elicit from them the "correct responses". It was only as teachers studied transcripts of recorded weekly sessions that they began to realize that the persistent questioning was designed to promote thinking about their implicit values, goals, and motives. The task of rational curriculum building began in earnest at this point.

One of the first major steps was the identification of three data sources as outlined in the Tyler Rationale and in Goodlad's

Conceptual System; the learner, subject-matter, and the society. Since the teachers were actively involved in observation and interaction with the learners, this proved to be a natural place for them to begin. Many hours were spent in dealing with such questions as "What are the characteristics of young children in general and of these children in particular?" "What developmental and educational tasks are of primary importance for them?" By describing those children who seemed to be particularly competent and who were able to function well in the school setting, and contrasting their characteristics and behavior with children who were having difficulty, some differentiating characteristics were identified. The resulting generalizations represented a composite from the observations of many children and not a description of a specific child or children. Some of the most important of them were:

a) enters the school situation with minimal anxiety; can separate from his parents or other significant adults.

b) knows his own strengths and weaknesses; knows those things he does well and those with which he has difficulty.

c) can do many things for himself; manage clothing, take care of bathroom needs, etc.

d) can control impulses well enough to manage in a group situation. (This may be a very small group and only for a short period of time.)

e) expresses feelings and ideas spontaneously and in appropriate ways.

f) has mastered basic skills of moving and manipulation; can walk, run, jump, hop. Can manipulate objects and instruments, (e.g., crayons, paint brushes, puzzles).

g) can listen and follow simple directions. Speaks clearly enough to be understood.

These items as they were restated in more general terms became the nucleus of the developing curriculum. They became:

a) trusts himself and can trust others.

b) is gaining a realistic concept of himself, his personal attributes, strengths, and limitations.

c) is gaining independence, self-reliance, and self-control.

d) is spontaneous in expressing his feelings and ideas.

e) interacts with his environment as he tests and defines reality.

The Early Childhood group next turned to the other data sources; society and subject matter. They encountered some difficulty in relating society in the broad sense to the lives and educational requirements of young children. Although it was recognized that such values as competition, achievement, and independence were operating in the middle-class culture from which these pupils came, their relevance to educational decisions was viewed by the teachers as remote. However, the more immediate society, particularly the parents of children in the school, exerted some influence. A brief description of how one generalization was dealt with may help illustrate the complexity of the process.

One concern frequently expressed by the parents was early academic achievement for their children, particularly that they would learn to read. In a purely linear approach, this knowledge might lead directly to the inclusion of reading instruction in the curriculum. But in this case other values operating in the school and held by the teachers led them to resist this conclusion. They emphasized their concern for other objectives more critical at this phase of schooling, especially those related to the child's self-concept. However, they did refer to the third data source, subject-matter, to help them identify some components of pre-and beginning reading in order to determine which, if any, should be in-

cluded. Thus the immediate societal values supporting reading instruction were acknowledged, but the decisions as to when and how it would be included were based upon the consideration and interaction of several elements from the conceptual framework and not simply a logical extension from one data source. It should be emphasized that the interactive process was essential. Properly employed it helped guard against a single-minded imposition of any set of objectives into the curriculum.

Both society and subject-matter were further examined as data sources and led to the inclusion of many cognitive and affective objectives. However, during the entire on-going process, the learner remained the primary data source considered by this group.

When the first rudimentary objectives had been generated, extrapolations were made in two directions; one, to statements of more global goals, the other to specific instructionsl objectives. In the first instance, the global statements were checked against institutional objectives as they were being developed concurrently in other parts of the school. Here they not only influenced the extension and refinement of institutional goals, but were in turn influenced by them. In the other direction, the analysis of general statements into specific instructional objectives proved to be both frustrating and exciting. As other educators have suggested, this group found it relatively easy to specify motor skills, and increasingly difficult to operationalize the higher level cognitive and affective statements. In spite of the difficulties, many significant instructional objectives were formulated. These objectives were tried out in the classrooms and were most useful as guides in the planning of learning opportunities. However, teachers found

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that further analysis was needed in order to refine the process of diagnosis. Therefore, behavioral continua were defined for each objective. For example, from the category "Caring for Personal Belongings", the continuum was as follows:

1) identifies personal belongings as his.

2) unable to locate own belongings when needed; asks others to put things in his locker for him.

3) verbalizes way to care for property in response to teachers' questions; cries or otherwise expresses objection when others use his belongings that he has left around room or yard.

4) usually puts sweaters, jackets, or shoes in locker; may leave personal toys around room.

5) keeps personal belongings in locker unless in use by self or on loan to others.

Through systematic observation, the teachers were able to locate the point on a continuum which described a child's characteristic level of functioning at any given time and thus plan strategies for helping him move toward the stated objective. The continuum also served as a criterion model in recording and evaluating a child's performance and progress.

As objectives and continua were formulated, learning opportunities were designed and implemented. In this way it was possible to evaluate their feasability and acceptability and, if indicated, to make revisions at all levels.

This paper was begun with a brief description of the Early Childhood Unit at the time the project was intitated. Perhaps a description of the Unit as it exists at the present time will indicate some of the changes that have occurred. Instead of self-contained, age-segregated classes, the Unit is now organized into team-taught, multi-aged groups ranging in size from 16 to 46 children.

Teachers are utilizing a well developed rationale to guide their decisions about children and programs. In addition, new instructional procedures have been introduced as pupils' needs were identified; two such procedures were self-selection reading and movement behavior.

A recent study by C. Ray Williams documented the effectiveness of the Unit in producing outcomes consistent with stated goals and objectives. Further, this study found that students from the University Elementary School scored significantly higher than a matched group from public schools on three curriculum areas examined; self-related skills, reading readiness skills, and social skills.

Problems the magnitude of those encountered in developing a multidimensional curriculum do not yield to easy answers. The process decribed was complex, time consuming, and circular. In this project Goodlad's Conceptual Model was not utilized in a linear, logical-deductive fashion but rather served as a framework upon which to build, organize, and validate curricular decisions. As such it was a most useful tool.

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GOODLAD'S CONCEPTUAL MODEL

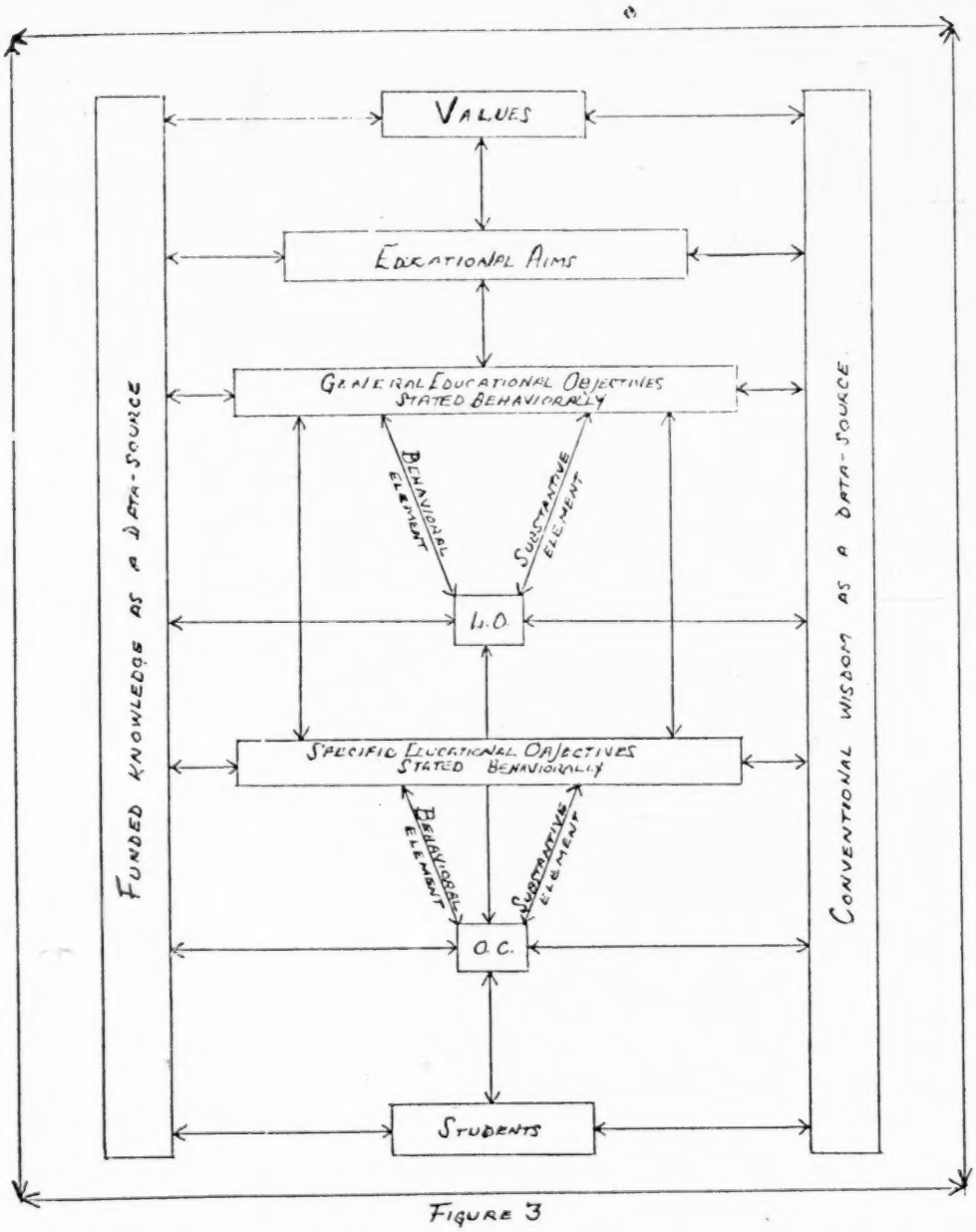
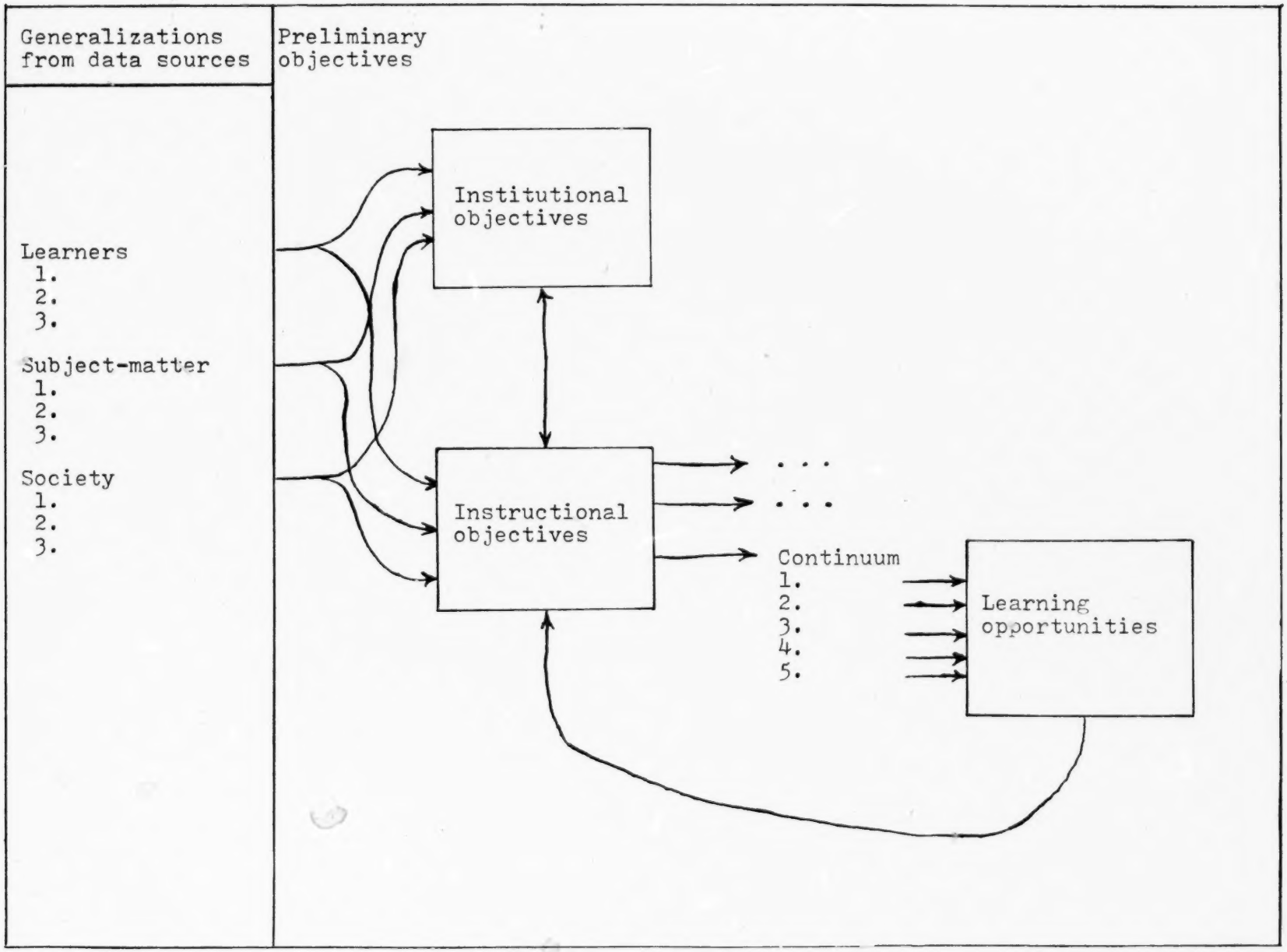


FIGURE 3

SUBSTANTIVE DECISIONS AND DERIVATIONS IN A CONCEPTUAL SYSTEM FOR CURRICULUM

Appendix i

Appendix ii



CURRICULUM PROJECT
PROCESS MODEL

INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

EARLY CHILDHOOD PHASE
(1966)

1. To relate to teachers as individuals and to accept teachers as sources of support, control, and guidance.

2. To develop the ability to communicate effectively.

3. To develop an attitude of inquiry about the world. To be persistent in learning and to search for meaning. To develop skills in ways of learning more about the world.

4. To utilize fundamental movement skills with control and mastery. (running, jumping, walking, climbing, balancing, skipping, hopping), to develop eye-hand coordination in manipulation of small objects (pencils, crayons, beads, pegs, puzzles, blocks, scissors). To utilize fundamental skills of perception.

5. To use the essential processes of conceptualization (associate ideas, classify, generalize, draw logical conclusions).

6. To relate to peers as individuals; accept differences and similarities in children (needs, interests, skills, strengths). To recognize the effect of his behavior on others and others' behavior on him.

7. To relate to himself as an individual; to develop self-appraisal, self-reliance, and self-control.

8. To recognize and accept the limitations, privileges, and responsibilities of being a member of a group. To understand these limitations, privileges, and responsibliities are flexible according to the situation. To understand that group living creates a need for rules.